

**Statement of Chairman Gary L. Ackerman  
Strategic Chaos and Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan  
Wednesday, April 2, 2008**

The Subcommittee will come to order. The Bush Administration seems singularly incapable of pulling together all the elements of national power into a coherent strategy that will assure us of victory in Afghanistan. But that's not my conclusion. Listen to what the Atlantic Council has to say: "Make no mistake, NATO is not winning in Afghanistan." Or the Center for the Presidency's Afghanistan Study Group: "The mission to stabilize Afghanistan is faltering." Or the International Crisis Group: "Afghanistan is not lost but the signs are not good." The President and his Administration have proven that they have no strategy to win in Afghanistan. The Chinese scholar of war, Sun Tzu, said that "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

It didn't have to be this way, and luckily there is still a chance it doesn't have to end this way. After the Taliban were removed from power in Afghanistan, the still smoldering conflict in that nation became nothing more than an afterthought for the Administration. And it wasn't just the invasion of Iraq that distracted them. Even before the Iraq invasion decisions were made that put the lie to the President's rhetoric about the importance of Afghanistan in this new fight against global terror. All you have to do is look at the difference in resources expended in Bosnia compared to those expended in Afghanistan. To restore order and create a nation in Bosnia the international community put in 19 soldiers for every 1,000 inhabitants. In Afghanistan that number is 1 per every 1,000 Afghans. And it gets worse. Per capita assistance in Bosnia is \$679 but in Afghanistan it is only \$57. And that's before American resources got diverted to Iraq.

But as more and more of us on this committee and in the Congress began to raise our concerns about Afghanistan going off the rails, about the Taliban regrouping, about al Qaeda regaining its safe haven, we were met with dismissal. To calls for additional troops, we were told there were enough troops to secure the country. To calls for more assistance, we were told there was plenty of money to accomplish our reconstruction goals. Only when it became apparent to all except the delusional – and those working for the President -- that the Afghan government couldn't govern outside of Kabul, and perhaps not even inside of Kabul, were we presented with Provincial Reconstruction Teams: an ad hoc response from an Administration with no plan. And that set the tone for the next 5 years.

After the attacks of September 11, there was extraordinary goodwill and support from the international community for American efforts to rid Afghanistan of terrorists and establish a functioning democratic state. So we took that goodwill and support and the soldiers and resources that came with it and divided up responsibilities in the country. We assumed the

responsibility of training the army; the British tackled the narcotics trade; the Germans agreed to train the police; the Italians offered to rebuild the judicial system. On paper this plan looked pretty good with everyone agreeing to contribute something that was desperately needed. The trouble with this plan was that each nation headed off in its own direction, at its own pace and the results reflect that. The Afghan National Army is still incapable of operating effectively on its own. Opium production in Afghanistan has skyrocketed providing cash for warlords and terrorists alike. The Afghan National Police are uniformly considered a disaster and Afghan citizens are actually more afraid of the police than they are of the Taliban. And the judicial system has utterly failed to demonstrate to ordinary Afghans that criminals will be prosecuted. Secretary Rice has said that in Afghanistan there are too many cooks. She's right, but she missed the more fundamental problem: there's no recipe.

This indigestible brew of incoherent internationalism was replicated by the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Again, many different nations stepped forward to lead a PRT but each nation has different rules of engagement, some even have to call back to their respective capitals before engaging the enemy at all. There is an extraordinary quote in the most recent ICG report wherein an Afghan observer expressed his astonishment at the international troop deployments: "some will fight day and night; some will fight only during the day; some will fight not at all."

Obviously, what's missing here is both a sense of coherence as well as a sense of urgency. Afghanistan is the place from where al Qaeda attacked us. It is the place where al Qaeda and their Taliban allies are strongest and fight us still. It is the place where the fight against terrorism began and it is the place where we have to finish it. But it has taken the Bush Administration a terribly long time to wake up to this fact. Perhaps too long.

Some 3200 Marines are either on their way to Afghanistan or will be on their way shortly. Good start, but the administration also needs to organize the mélange of international military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan into a strategy where all the players are marching in the same direction and at the same pace. The NATO summit that begins today provides an excellent opportunity to address the immediate issue of resource and troop shortages and, in that regard, I welcome the pledges of additional troops from France, Britain, and Poland. But the summit must be more than a pledging conference. It must produce an effective strategy to defeat al Qaeda and the Taliban. That strategy must be supported not only by the governments represented at the summit but by their publics who increasingly think its time their troops came home. In order to gain that public support, the strategy must provide a clear and finite path to victory. We are still a long way from that victory and Afghanistan is still a long way from secure. We need the continued support of our friends and allies in order to prevail in Afghanistan -- but to sustain that support, we must also convince our friends and allies that the plan for Afghanistan is more than simply lurching from crisis to crisis. They must believe that what they are hearing in Afghanistan, and in the halls of power in Washington, is more than just the noise before defeat.

Now I'll turn to my friend, the Ranking Member, Mr. Pence.

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